

Vol. I No. 1
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The Newsletter
of the Wichita
Film Society

cinegraph

The Wichita Film Society came into existence in 1951 to promote and exhibit films that were, as one of the founders, Professor William Nelson, put it, "unusual and not to be seen in local commercial theaters." In the thirty-six years since its inception, the goals of the Society have broadened, but remained essentially unchanged. As in its early days, WFS is an educational and cultural institution with membership open to anyone in the greater Wichita metropolitan area.

This newsletter is planned as a resource to alternative cinema and film "happenings" in general in this area. We hope to serve as a central source of information not only for the regular film series in town but for special events and one-of-a-kind showings. For instance, in March, not only were there showings at the Art Association and at WSU, but a "silent movie night" concert and film sponsored by the Theater Organ Society at Century II, and two very welcome screenings of Academy Award-nominated short films at the Wichita Public Library. Our goal is to present virtually complete listings of film showings in Wichita-- along with coverage of the film scene in general.

One area that we think will be of particular interest is a column we call COMING SOON... MAYBE, which will provide advance notice of art films that may be coming to local theaters, based on information from local theater managers and educated guesses. While a goodly portion of these films may never play, by spotlighting them we hope to drum up support for the ones that do... so that their success will help bring others to town.

This newsletter will be available every other month at a number of locations around town, including the Art Association and the Wichita Public Libraries. We will also send it to anyone who requests it by phone (264-5681) or by mail to CINEGRAPH, c/o Ben Urish, Editor, 301 W. 11th, Wichita 67203; there is no cost but we request a \$2.00 donation to help defray postage.

Any information regarding film screenings, local production and the like is requested; please send it to the above address. And if you or your organization require help or information regarding film, whether history, programming, availability or whatever you might need, the Wichita Film Society will be glad to help.

Welcome to CINEGRAPH, the newsletter of Wichita's oldest, and often only, organization devoted to the art of film: the Wichita Film Society.

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KING KUNG FU TO HAVE PREMIERE -- AFTER THIRTEEN YEARS

The long-awaited premiere of Bob Walterscheid and Lance Hayes' KING KUNG FU will be held at last at the Crest Theater, 4825 E. Douglas, on Friday, May 29th. The dual parody of kung fu movies and KING KONG was filmed in Wichita in 1974 with many local personalities, went through long legal tangles at the time of Dino DeLaurentiis's 1976 remake of KING KONG, and has never been shown publicly. The premiere night will be a benefit for the Leukemia Society at the price of \$30; it will then play for one week at regular prices. Tickets for the premiere are available from the Leukemia Society at 1405 S. Hydraulic; telephone 262-2417.

WILL THERE EVER
BE A COMMERCIAL
ART MOVIE HOUSE
IN WICHITA?

Michael Gebert

It's been tried, they say. And people just won't support an art theater in Wichita. But I think there are reasons to think that what didn't work before could work now. In fact, an entire group of factors probably make this the most propitious time for an art house to be successful in Wichita since the late 50's.

Ironically, I think a lot of the credit can be given to the theater business' two biggest competitors, home video and cable TV. Between them, they've exposed audiences to a much wider range of films than they used to see in theaters and on network TV, and they've also provided a financial cushion for a number of independent distributors. At a time when studios have gotten more conservative and teen-oriented, it's the independents who back adult (and often Oscar-winning) movies like *PLATOON*, *KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN*, *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*, etc. And while those movies may not match the grosses of a *GHOSTBUSTERS*, they also don't flop as bad as a *HOWARD THE DUCK*. Aesthetics aside, if you owned a theater, wouldn't you rather be in the sixth week of *KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN* than in the second and last week of *TAI-PAN* or *OVER THE TOP*?

Add to that the fact that Wichita has one of the highest concentrations of theaters in the country (for instance, Kansas City, with better than six times the population, has less than three times as many screens). And with new Dickinson theaters being built at Northrock and two screens being added to Cinemas East, it's going to be harder to profitably fill those theaters. Big Hollywood hits will always be the mainstay of the business, and rightly so, but will it really be competitive to play a picture at two different theaters within a couple of miles of Central and Rock? Traditionally, the other way to fill a screen has been to revive something, but video seems to have killed off that business-- recently the studios have flopped with well-publicized national revivals of such hits as *GHOSTBUSTERS*, *GREMLINS*, *E.T.* and a double-bill of *ALIENS* and *THE FLY*.

On the other hand, both nationally and locally, art films like *KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN*, *SHE'S GOTTA HAVE IT*, *THE TRIP TO BOUNTIFUL* and *BELIZAIRE THE CAJUN* have enjoyed quite respectable runs. And it seems clear that those runs are lasting longer than a few years ago, when art films almost never played a second week. In those days, clearly, theater owners were bringing art films just out of the goodness of their hearts (and it is to their credit that they seemed willing to try a couple of times every year); now I'd bet they're making a little money at it, too.

What's happening nationally is that multiplex theaters are turning one of their four or six theaters into an art house, much more economically than it would be to run a single-screen art theater. Not relying on tiny ads in the paper to hit an audience cold, they're sending out mailings and working with reviewers, and most importantly, providing continuity of programming, year-round, so that interested patrons always know to check what's at "The Bijou at Oak Park" in Kansas City, for instance, and trust that it's probably of interest. (One of the purposes this newsletter is to help get advance word out so that these movies don't just sneak into town.) At Oak Park, this has been so successful that sometimes "The Bijou" occupies two screens instead of just one-- in addition to Kansas City's several other art houses.

Now as I've said, it has been tried here-- but usually in a theater (the Westway, the Fox) that was on the verge of closing anyway, because of its location. And the one time it was tried at a successful theater, at

CALENDAR

4/17 (F) OUR HOSPITALITY/WHEN THE CLOUDS ROLL BY-- The first is one of Buster Keaton's best silent comedies; the second is one of Douglas Fairbanks Sr.'s rarely-seen early films, before he turned to costume pictures. Art Association, 8:00 pm, \$2.00.

4/17-18 (F-Sa) GIRL CRAZY-- Gershwin Festival/Wichita Film Society screening of the first (1932) film version of one of Gershwin's stage hits; the vaudeville duo of Wheeler & Woolsey (sort of a George Burns and Lou Costello) star and the score includes "I Got Rhythm" and "Embraceable You." Plus two Hollywood shorts. CAC Theater, 7:00 & 9:30, free.

4/24 (F) LA MAMAN ET LA PUTAIN-- A rare showing of a 1973 French epic (3-1/2 hours) of the Paris cafes, with Jean-Pierre Leaud as a smooth charmer whose obsession is the legacy of the 60's. Art Association, 7:30 pm, \$2.00.

4/25-26 (Sa-Su) SHOAH-- Claude Lanzmann's 9-1/2 hour documentary on the Holocaust, centering on penetrating interviews with survivors and with the people who operated the machinery that made it possible (such as the engineer who ran the train that went to Treblinka). Regarded as one of the most outstanding documentaries ever made. Part I: Saturday, 7:00 pm. Part II: Sunday, 1:00 pm. Ahlberg Hall/WSU, free.

5/1 (F) DOWN BY LAW-- 1986 independent comedy by Jim Jarmusch, whose STRANGER THAN PARADISE in '83 was a major independent success. Two lowlifes in a New Orleans jail are inspired to escape by a loopy Italian immigrant. Art Association, 8:00 pm, \$3.00.

5/8 (F) THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES/THE TRIUMPH OF SHERLOCK HOLMES-- The first stars Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce, the second the little-known but superb Arthur Wontner. Art Association, 8:00 pm, \$2.00. On Saturday, 5/9 at 8:00 pm, Sherlockian expert John Bennett Shaw will speak on Holmes at the Art Association; the talk is free.

5/15 (F) SHERMAN'S MARCH-- A charming and funny 1986 documentary about the New South by Ross McElwee, focusing on old friends and girlfriends he met along the general's path. Art Association, 8:00 pm, \$3.00.

5/22 (F) THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY-- Sergio Leone's classic spaghetti western, in a rare screening in its original Cinemascope format. Art Association, 8:00 pm, \$2.00.

5/29 (F) TRIBUTE TO LOUISE BROOKS-- A program honoring the famous silent screen siren from Kansas, featuring the area premiere of the restored DIARY OF A LOST GIRL (1929) and the only documentary she participated in. Art Association, 8:00 pm, \$3.00.

5/29-6/4 (F-Th) KING KUNG FU-- The legendary unseen parody of King Kong and Kung Fu movies, filmed in Wichita in 1974, finally receives its premiere at the Crest as a benefit for the Leukemia Society. (See related article.)



Tribute to Louise Brooks

CALENDAR

6/5 (F)

FESTIVAL OF WORLD ANIMATION-- A collection of the best in recent animation, including a short by the team that did the "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" commercials. Art Association, 8:00 p.m., \$3.00.

LOCATIONS OF REGULAR SERIES

Note: most of these series put out their own schedules. Call the numbers listed for more information.

Art Association-- 9112 E. Central, 686-6687.

CAC Theater (Wichita Film Society and others)-- WSU campus, 689-3495.

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COMING SOON...
MAYBE

COMING SOON... MAYBE is a column intended to publicize unusual or art films which may open commercially in Wichita... so that if and when they do, people interested in film will already be aware of them and ready to support them. It is based on information from local theater managers, as well as the educated guesses of Cinegraph writers.

'ROUND MIDNIGHT, with its Oscar nomination for Dexter Gordon as a dissipated jazzman briefly aided by a young French jazz fanatic, has been widely acclaimed as the best fictional jazz film ever made. Director Bertrand Tavernier, best known for A SUNDAY IN THE COUNTRY, renders the jazz milieu of Paris and New York perfectly, and Gordon (playing a character based on Bud Powell and Lester Young-- and, clearly, on Dexter Gordon) gives a remarkable natural performance. English and French.

A ROOM WITH A VIEW. James Ivory's adaptation of the Henry James novel about a young Englishwoman loosening up and finding romance in Italy earned lots of Oscar attention; at least two theater chains tried unsuccessfully to bring it here earlier, so it may turn up yet. Helena Bonham-Carter, Daniel Day-Lewis (MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE), Julian Sands (ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS) and Denholm Elliott star.

THE DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN EMPIRE is a Quebecois variation on THE BIG CHILL. As a group of men (mostly professors) prepare dinner and talk about their sexual escapades and problems, their wives and girlfriends do the same at a local health spa; and when they get together, it becomes clear that their romantic activities are not so carefree as they seem. Denys Arcand's Oscar-nominated film is one of the best "adult" movies of the past few years, intelligent and free of moralizing (though not without a sense of ethics), and full of believable characterizations and observations. French language.

HOLLYWOOD SHUFFLE. Black comic Robert Townsend's loosely structured satire on Hollywood's attitudes toward blacks (one sketch features a school that teaches Oxford-educated black actors to talk like Superfly). Despite the predictable comparisons to Woody Allen, this sounds as much KENTUCKY FRIED MOVIE as RADIO DAYS, but it has made an overnight star of Townsend as an independent version of Eddie Murphy (whom Townsend does not spare in his film).

ART THEATERS
(cont.)

Cinemas East, the effort was, frankly, half-hearted; rather than select the films that were drawing the biggest crowds in other cities, Commonwealth booked a package of films, some successful but most not, from one distributor at what was probably a bargain price. It's not surprising that few rushed to see this collection of minor French comedies, and that after six weeks (not nearly long enough to give it a fair trial), it died. Yet that same exhibitor has had good success with better-publicized art films at that theater and others (and to be fair, Commonwealth has brought the most art films to town of our three local chains).

With an abundance of screens (when Northrock opens, each chain will have a major multiplex right in the city's most prosperous area) and the increasing success of art films on their occasional runs, there is no reason why a serious attempt at an art theater with major films-- the likes of *A ROOM WITH A VIEW*, *THE DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN EMPIRE*, etc.-- could not prove to be more consistently successful than trying to fill those seats with films that are playing just down the road. (There is another complication-- both Commonwealth and Dickinson were simply unable to lure one of the limited number of prints of *A ROOM WITH A VIEW* away from more assuredly profitable bookings in other cities.) Of course, it's not going to be the theater owners' fault if this time they try it and nobody shows. Most of the theater managers I've known have wanted to play art films but knew from experience that they weren't profitable. As I've said, that seems to have changed in the past few years. If you'd like to see what I've described happen, the best thing you could do is to write the theater owners and tell them you'd support their efforts-- and the next time something like *SHE'S GOTTA HAVE IT* or *MONA LISA* does open, anywhere in town, put your money where your mouth is.

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LOCAL BOY
MAKES GOOD

Wichita-based film historian J.B. Kaufman is breaking into print this spring-- twice.

Postscript, a scholarly journal of film and the humanities published at the University of Jacksonville (Florida), will publish this spring his piece on the production of Walt Disney's *MER-BABIES*, a 1936 cartoon which was a rare instance of the very busy Disney contracting work to outside animators. And an article on the production and success of Disney's famous *THE THREE LITTLE PIGS* is set to appear later this year in American Cinematographer, the widely-read film magazine published by the cinematographer's union (locally available at Rector's and Waldenbooks). Particularly fascinating is Kaufman's discovery that demand for the film was so high that some California theater owners were running French and Spanish-language prints, just to be able to show it! Another interesting anecdote involves a sequence in which the wolf appeared as a stereotypical Jewish peddler (then a stock comic character), and how the sequence was reanimated in the 40's to remove the by-then-offensive stereotype.

These will be Kaufman's first appearances in national print, but he has been active for some years as a researcher in his areas of specialty, silent film and Disney animation, interviewing stars such as Blanche Sweet and numerous Disney staffers, and assisting British film historian Kevin Brownlow in the research for the series Unknown Chaplin seen recently on PBS. Locally Kaufman, a member of WFS and of the WAA Films board, has spoken at programs on Blanche Sweet (for WFS) and on silent westerns for WAA Films, and written the program notes for the last several Wurlitzer Pops silent movie nights.

Cinegraph

THE WICHITA
FILM SOCIETY
Founded 1951

c/o Ben Urish
301 W. 11th
Wichita, KS
67203

HISTORY OF WFS
NEARS COMPLETION

A volume covering the history of the Wichita Film Society is nearly finished, reports project coordinator/researcher Ben Urish. Anyone possessing old film schedules, newspaper articles, or any other information regarding the Society should get in touch with Mr. Urish so that the information can be included in the volume. The largest gap involves the names of Society Chairpersons in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Your help would be welcomed.

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WFS' FIRST
SEASON

The Wichita Film Society's first season in 1951-1952 consisted of:

DEAD OF NIGHT (British horror thriller)
THE CIRCUS (Charlie Chaplin)
THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI (German Expressionist classic)
CRIME AND PUNISHMENT
TICKLE LITTLE ISLAND (British comedy, aka WHISKEY CALORE)
PASSPORT TO PIMLICO (British comedy)
TORMENT (Swedish drama)
THE WELL-DICGGER'S DAUGHTER (French comedy-drama)

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OFFER MADE FOR
SOCIETY ARCHIVES

Michael Kelly, Curator of the Special Collections department of the Ablah Library at WSU, has expressed an interest in housing the Wichita Film Society's papers. The papers are an important reference point not only in the history of Wichita State University, as WFS was instrumental in the development of programming at the Campus Activities Center, but of the entire city and its art community.

The Ablah Library would also accept copies of the WFS history upon its completion, as would the office of the City Historian. As of yet no decision about the housing of the papers has been made. If you know of any archive material, please inform us so that we may preserve this part of our, and our city's, history.